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SUBJECT: MAKE HASTE SLOWLY - CARICOM INTER-SESSIONAL

Classified By: Ambassador David M. Robinson for reasons 1.4 (b) and (d)

¶1. (C) Summary: Foreign Minister Rudy Insanally told the Ambassador that the Heads of Government participating in the 18th CARICOM Inter-Sessional in St. Vincent on February 12-14 were determined to "make haste slowly" on a range of issues including governance, trade, economic development and regional air transportation. His measured description trims the "Forward, march!" jubilation the local media and CARICOM officials described. Insanally said that two sticking points were a new governance structure for CARICOM and a Trinidad and Tobago drafted regional energy policy. Talks will resume in Barbados in July. In the meantime, CARICOM's timetable for a single market and economy and other steps toward regional cooperation appears to have few fixed points. End Summary.

¶2. (C) Foreign Minister Insanally told the Ambassador the afternoon of February 21 that the 18th CARICOM Heads of Government Inter-Sessional produced few action items but agreed to "make haste slowly" on a recidivist agenda that included trade, the free movement of people, economic development, regional air transportation, security, energy and governance. His tempered enthusiasm trimmed the description--"A watershed meeting!" and "Forward, march!"--offered to PolOff by CARICOM Foreign and Community Relations Executive Director Fay Housty in a separate meeting and touted in the official communique. Insanally said he and his CARICOM colleagues were satisfied to tread carefully on most issues and looked forward to continued careful progress at the next meeting in July in Barbados. He also said the group adopted a proposal by Guyana's President Jagdeo to hold a donors' meeting in Trinidad sometime in June 2007 to discuss region-wide trade and investment, particularly in agriculture.

¶3. (C) Insanally said the two most contentious issues addressed at the meeting were creation of a governing commission within the CARICOM Secretariat to speed up community decision-making and implementation, and a Trinidad and Tobago drafted regional energy policy. Delegates reacted tepidly to the Trinidadian proposal, refusing to discuss it pending lengthy staff review. Insanally described their go slow response as a measure of Venezuela's success realigning interests in the sector. He also said participants gave mixed reviews to the suggestion of a permanent governing commission to implement community decisions without reference back to individual capitals. Guyana's president Bharrat Jagdeo reportedly led opposition to the measure, in part out of reluctance to "pool" sovereignty for an uncertain advantage, and more pointedly to curb CARICOM's habit, Insanally said, of creating programs and processes without regard to cost. The group will study the proposed measure and discuss it again in July.

¶4. (C) Freedom of movement within the community also emerged as a difficult issue, according to Insanally. All participants agreed with the principle, and discussed expanding existing categories to include nurses and artisans, but struggled to find the dividing line between facilitating the cross-border flow of skilled people and stopping the increasingly evident brain drain in poorer countries. He said no practical suggestions were tabled but noted that the issue will resurface in Barbados.

¶5. (C) In the meantime, Housty told Poloff that delegates agreed a framework for a single Caribbean economy should be in place by late 2008, with inauguration set for 2015. Housty added that remaining obstacles included harmonizing tax and currency laws. She also said discussion of regional air travel was lively. Rising prices attending the merger of Caribbean Star and LIAT, along with an abysmal on-time and baggage handling record for BWIA replacement Caribbean airlines, convinced CARICOM leaders to call for a special meeting of the Council for Trade and Economic Development to harmonize air travel in the region. They set no firm date for the gathering.

¶7. (C) Comment: CARICOM is both a reflection and a promise. Profound cultural differences within the region and with us, tied to micro-states' trepidation about being blended into a supranational body, mean that agreement does not always lead to quick progress. The Secretariat itself is a warehouse of talent going stale. Under the circumstances, making haste slowly is not a bad outcome. End comment.

Robinson